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Columbus City Attorney Goes to Court to Shut Down Two Drug Houses in Two Days

Hungarian Village and Hilltop properties the scene of cocaine and heroin trafficking, authorities confiscate 'stockpile' of weapons

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein announced today that the City of Columbus secured court orders on two consecutive days to vacate and shutter two properties that were the targets of separate, long-term covert investigations following a series of community complaints. Records indicate that police have responded to the two properties at least 80 combined times.

City Attorney Klein's office filed a complaint for preliminary and permanent injunctive relief in the Franklin County Environmental Court to board up a duplex converted into four apartment units at [347-349 1/2 E. Welch Ave.](#) on the city's south side. Columbus Police narcotics detectives had obtained evidence of illegal drug activity occurring in all four of the apartment units at various different times since 2016.

At a court hearing yesterday, the owner of the property, Michael Herr, entered into a stipulated agreement with the City Attorney's office wherein the property was declared a public nuisance and will be boarded up for one year. The owner will be allowed limited access to the property in order to repair and renovate it for the purpose of trying to sell it.

Today, the court also granted the City Attorney's request for an *ex parte* temporary restraining order to immediately board up [283 S. Eureka Avenue](#), which was the scene of at least 50 police runs in the first half of this year for multiple incidents of assault, domestic disputes, shots fired, weapons violations, vandalism/criminal damaging and other illegal activity. When authorities executed a search warrant at the premises late last month, a large cache of firearms and live ammunition was confiscated.

“Given the most recent spike in drug overdoses, this really is an ‘all-hands-on-deck’ type of moment not only for our local community, but for our society as a whole,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. “We always emphasize that we need to tackle the drug epidemic from all angles and using the statutory authority of civil court in order to shut down nuisance drug properties is one piece of the puzzle.”

According to court documents, Columbus Police began investigating 347-349 1/2 E. Welch Ave. in 2015 on suspicion of illegal narcotics being sold from the premises. In 2016, crack cocaine was being sold from unit 349 and heroin from unit 349 1/2. In 2017, crack cocaine was being sold from unit 347. This year, investigators found heroin being sold from units 347 1/2 and 349

1/2.

On January 23, 2018 and again on August 8, 2018, narcotics detectives executed search warrants at the premises. As a result of the latter search warrant, officers made an arrest and recovered heroin, crack cocaine, marijuana, two semi-automatic weapons with live rounds and \$1675 in cash.

Throughout their investigation, police officials sent a total of four certified letters to the owner notifying him of the illegal activities occurring at his property and the potential consequences for failing to abate the nuisances. The premises also were cited last month for code violations, including an emergency order to address unsecure openings allowing access to vacant portions of the structure.

“This is a part of town that is on the rebound, with responsible homeowners, business owners and residents looking to make a difference,” said Assistant City Attorney Tiara Ross. “That’s why it is so important for us to root out the drug activity and attendant crimes that are negatively impacting the safety of the neighborhood.”

Columbus Police began investigating 283 S. Eureka Ave. on the city’s west side after receiving complaints of gunshots and drug sales at the premises late last year. In February, police officials notified the owner, Merrill Cochran, that the property had become a hotspot for drug dealing and shots fired. According to court documents, the owner “stated that there would be no further incidents.” However, Columbus Police have continued to respond to calls for service at the property and the Franklin County Sheriff’s office launched an independent investigation after they also received complaints of illegal drug sales taking place at the premises.

Late last month, detectives from the Sheriff’s office executed a search warrant and seized evidence of drug activity along with a 9mm semi-automatic pistol with live rounds, a .357 revolver with live rounds, a .44 Magnum revolver with live rounds, a .22 caliber “luger style” pistol with live rounds, an assault rifle magazine containing live ammunition, a double barrel shotgun and a bolt action rifle of unknown make with “Soviet” marks on it.

After the court order was issued earlier today, the Columbus Police IN/TAC unit conducted a surprise raid on the property this afternoon to clear it out and secure the premises. A follow-up hearing with the owner is scheduled in the Environmental Court on September 24, 2018 at 11:00 a.m.

“We greatly appreciate the court granting the emergency board-up order and want to thank both the Columbus Police Division and the Franklin County Sheriff’s office for their diligent work on this case,” said Assistant City Attorney Zachary Gwin. “With the numerous reports of shots fired and the alarming number of deadly weapons containing live rounds found at this property, it was only a matter of time before something even more tragic occurred there.”

Copies of the city’s [agreed judgment](#) for 347-349 1/2 E. Welch Ave. and the [court’s order](#) for 283 S. Eureka Ave. are available online.

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